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Tuesday, 24 November 2009, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Mayr-Harting	(Austria)
Members:	Burkina Faso	Mr. Tiendrébéogo
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Costa Rica	Mr. Urbina
	Croatia	Mr. Vilović
	France	Mr. Araud
	Japan	Mr. Takasu
	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Shalgham
	Mexico	Mr. Puente
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Turkey	Mr. Apakan
	Uganda	Mr. Rugunda
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Haile Menkerios, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Menkerios. I now give the floor to Mr. Menkerios.

Mr. Menkerios: Since Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Lynn Pascoe briefed the Security Council on 14 October, political efforts towards a negotiated two-State solution have reached a deep and worrying impasse, even as security and economic efforts have continued on the ground.

Members of the Council will recall the Quartet's support for President Obama's efforts to relaunch negotiations. In furtherance of those efforts, United States Secretary of State Clinton visited the region between 31 October and 4 November and President Obama met Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in Washington, D.C., on 9 November. However, it has not yet proven possible to resume negotiations.

In the absence of mutual commitments to fully implement Road Map obligations and agreed terms of reference for negotiations, an impasse has developed that must be overcome. A key challenge has arisen from the Israeli Government's proposal to restrain rather than freeze settlement activity. Such restraint would not conform to Road Map requirements and would reportedly not apply at all in occupied East Jerusalem. The importance of this issue was underscored on 17 November when a Government planning commission approved the addition of 900 housing units to significantly expand the settlement of Gilo on the southern outskirts of occupied East Jerusalem. Furthermore, there were 17 house demolitions carried out in East Jerusalem during the reporting period, including 7 over a two-day period on 17 and 18 November, leading to the total displacement of 99 Palestinians, more than half of whom were children.

The Secretary-General issued a statement deploring Israel's settlement activity. He reiterated that settlements were illegal, called on Israel to implement its Road Map commitments, and underlined that such actions undermine efforts for peace and cast doubt on the viability of the two-State solution. The Secretary-General separately expressed his dismay at the continuation of demolitions and evictions in Jerusalem. Basing their efforts based on well-known Quartet positions, the Quartet envoys are actively engaged on those issues.

On 5 November, President Abbas expressed his deep frustration at the political impasse in a televised speech. He stated that he had no desire to nominate himself in the forthcoming presidential elections and indicated that there were other steps he would take in due course. The Secretary-General has been in contact with President Abbas to underline his support for his leadership.

Earlier, on 23 October, in accordance with the Palestinian Basic Law, President Abbas issued a decree calling for presidential and legislative elections to be held on 24 January 2010, at the end of the four-year term of the Palestinian Legislative Council. However, on 28 October, Hamas declared that, in the absence of an intra-Palestinian reconciliation accord, it would not allow elections to be held in Gaza, and made threats against anyone planning to be involved in electoral preparations.

On 3 November, Hamas shut down the Gaza offices of the independent Central Elections Commission. The Commission announced on 12 November that holding elections on 24 January 2010 would no longer be possible. This is deeply regrettable. We hope that it will be possible in the future to hold free and fair elections throughout the occupied Palestinian territory.

Throughout this period, Egypt's efforts to secure factional agreement on its proposed reconciliation package continued. This package envisages elections in

June 2010. Fatah signed the latest Egyptian proposal on 12 October, while Hamas has so far failed to do so. This, too, is regrettable. We continue to support Egypt's efforts.

The political uncertainty on the Palestinian side has not interrupted continued Palestinian efforts to meet Road Map commitments, pursue economic and security cooperation, and build institutions for statehood. For instance, the Palestinian Authority security forces dismantled two unexploded devices near Jenin on 14 and 18 October. On 15 October, they handed over some 20 pipe bombs confiscated in Nablus to the Israel Defense Forces, which detonated them in a controlled manner. We continue to urge the Palestinian Authority to maintain its efforts to improve law and order, fight extremism and end incitement.

In a positive development with significant economic benefits for the West Bank, on 10 November the new Wataniya telecommunications company announced the launch of its commercial services in the West Bank, although the bandwidth required has yet to be released. Also on 10 November, the Jalameh crossing near Jenin was opened for Arab Israelis to cross by vehicle, allowing them to travel to Jenin, thus supporting local businesses and strengthening critical linkages between the West Bank and Israel.

Predictable and free movement and access both within the West Bank and between the West Bank and Israel has consistently been identified as an important factor for sustained economic development. There are currently 579 movement obstacles in the West Bank, down from 592 in September.

Despite those positive steps, financial challenges remain. As we approach the year's end, the overall projected Palestinian Authority budget deficit for 2009 is estimated at $1.5 billion, for which there is a projected financing gap estimated at $350 million. Although some donor funding is anticipated, without additional support, the Palestinian Authority is likely to be forced to resort to further commercial borrowing to meet its obligations. This will place additional pressure on fiscal sustainability in the future.

Tensions have continued from incidents involving Palestinians, Israeli security forces and settlers across the West Bank. During the reporting period, which coincided with the olive harvesting season, there were 45 recorded instances of Israeli settler attacks on Palestinians and olive trees, leading to 24 Palestinian injuries. On 12 November, an Israeli settler was indicted by an Israeli court for the murder of two Palestinians 12 years ago and other alleged politically motivated attacks. There were 26 incidents involving Palestinian violence towards Israeli settlers, in which seven settlers were injured. In addition to continued settlement activity, no steps were taken in the reporting period to remove unauthorized outposts erected since March 2001.

During this reporting period, 73 Palestinians were injured and over 300 arrested during Israeli raids in the West Bank, representing an increase from the previous reporting period. Clashes took place on an almost daily basis around the Qalandiya checkpoint between East Jerusalem and Ramallah, where an Israeli security guard sustained moderate injuries after being stabbed by a Palestinian woman on 25 October. We note that seven Hamas-affiliated members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, including the mayor of Jenin, were released by Israel on 1 and 2 November.

The situation in occupied East Jerusalem underscores the importance of parties refraining from provocations or incitement. In this context, in addition to continued settlement expansion and to the house demolitions in East Jerusalem I have already mentioned, armed settlers attempted on 30 October to take over a Palestinian house in East Jerusalem, leaving four Palestinians injured. On 3 November, a group of armed Israeli settlers escorted by Israeli security forces entered and took control of a Palestinian home in East Jerusalem, claiming legal ownership of the property.

There were renewed confrontations on 25 October around Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount between Israeli security forces and Palestinians who were throwing stones. The clashes left 24 Palestinians and nine Israeli security personnel injured. Twenty-one Palestinians were arrested. We commend the efforts of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in lowering tensions. We remind the Council that Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem remain closed by Israeli order, contrary to Israel's Road Map obligations.

I now turn to Gaza. It is more than 10 months since the conclusion of Operation Cast Lead, but key elements of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) are yet to be fulfilled. We remain worried about the longer-term consequences of the blockade of the Gaza Strip, particularly in terms of deteriorating public infrastructure, environmental degradation and the destruction of livelihoods. During the reporting period,

imported truckloads into Gaza mostly consisted of food items and hygiene products, and there were no exports.

To cope with immediate needs, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is finalizing a winter response plan, representing the bare minimum required to address the most urgent humanitarian needs for winter, focusing on fuel requirements for the electricity plant; emergency infrastructure items such as sheeting, glass and roof tiles for repairs to houses, schools and clinics; and immediate water and sanitation material, such as water pumps. Full Israeli cooperation will be required to secure the urgent entry of these items.

The Israeli Government has indicated a readiness to facilitate water and sanitation projects. Two desalination units for UNICEF are currently being installed in the Gaza Strip after their entry was approved, but no materials have yet entered Gaza for three other projects whose approval was reported in previous briefings. The United Nations is compiling a comprehensive list of both urgent and long-term water and sanitation needs, along with material required, which will be presented to the Israeli Government in response to its stated willingness to work in a comprehensive and systematic manner on water and sanitation.

Beyond immediate humanitarian needs and the water and sanitation sector, I regret to inform the Security Council that the United Nations has not yet received a satisfactory response from the Israeli Government to the proposal, put forward in May, to complete $77 million-worth of stalled projects of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the United Nations Development Programme in the area of housing units and school and health facilities. The United Nations has left no stone unturned in seeking approval of this package in extensive consultations with the Israeli authorities, and is confident of its capacity to ensure the integrity of programming. It is completely unacceptable that no meaningful progress has been made in kick-starting United Nations civilian construction activities essential to the well-being and recovery of a war- and blockade-affected population, half of whom are children.

According to Israeli Government officials, arms continued to be smuggled and increased-capability rockets have been test-fired from the Gaza Strip, including rockets with a 60-kilometre range capable of reaching Tel Aviv. Egyptian efforts to counter smuggling of such materiel into the Strip have continued. During the reporting period, 12 rockets and mortars were fired from Gaza into southern Israel. There were no Israeli casualties. Israel conducted 19 incursions and nine air strikes on the Strip, which left one Palestinian child dead and 22 Palestinians injured. Five Palestinians are reported to have been killed and 22 injured in accidents involving the collapse of tunnels between Gaza and Egypt.

Within Gaza, on 9 November, Hamas closed down the International Federation of Journalists and public assembly remains severely restricted. On a positive note, practical cooperation between the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Waqf and Hamas in Gaza has so far allowed 2,500 pilgrims to leave Gaza to perform the pilgrimage. An immediate concern is that approximately 750 students in Gaza have been unable to leave the Strip in pursuit of higher education opportunities abroad and are now at imminent risk of losing their places at university, tuition deposits and visas.

Efforts continue to secure the release of Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit, along with a number of the more than 9,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. The Secretary-General has continued to reiterate his call for Corporal Shalit's release. Likewise, he has underscored the importance of the release of Palestinian prisoners, as emphasized by President Abbas.

On 5 November, the General Assembly adopted resolution 64/10, entitled "Follow-up to the report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict". In accordance with the request contained in the resolution, the Secretary-General transmitted the report of the Fact-Finding Mission to the Security Council on 11 November.

Regarding comprehensive regional peace, during the reporting period both the Israeli and Syrian leaderships were engaged through third parties in efforts to explore prospects for making progress. However, there have been no concrete developments in this regard. On 15 October, two Syrian prisoners from the occupied Golan were released by Israel. On the ground, the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan remained quiet during the reporting period, although Israeli settlement activity continues.

On 9 November, President Sleiman and Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri signed the decree

forming Lebanon's seventieth Government, five months after the parliamentary elections of 7 June. The Secretary-General welcomed the formation of a national unity Government and expressed his hope that Lebanese political leaders would continue to work steadfastly in the spirit of unity, dialogue and cooperation. A ministerial statement is yet to be agreed upon, after which Parliament is expected to express confidence in the new Government and its programme. The United Nations looks forward to working with the new Government to implement Security Council resolutions and to address the substantive challenges facing Lebanon.

Since the briefing made to the Council on the report (S/2009/566) on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), the situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has remained quiet However, air violations have continued on an almost daily basis.

Last month, Mr. Pascoe reminded the Security Council (see S/PV.6201) that, without a credible political horizon — including commitments made, monitored and kept, and a calling to account when obligations are breached — forces of violence, tension and extremism on both sides will fill the vacuum. We now face the very real danger of such a vacuum, with no Israeli-Palestinian negotiations under way, no agreed terms of reference for such negotiations and no framework in place to ensure the implementation of Road Map obligations, as demonstrated by the incidents reported on during this period.

The decision of President Abbas not to seek a new term as Palestinian President, in a context of uncertainty over both elections and Palestinian unity, reflects a worrying assessment, from a leader unquestionably devoted to peace, that the political process lacks sufficient content and credibility at this time. This is a loud and clear wake-up call. If we cannot move decisively forward to a final status agreement, we risk sliding backwards, with both the Palestinian Authority and the two-State solution itself imperilled.

Together with Quartet partners, the Secretary-General remains active in seeking a clear strategy on the way forward. He believes that this requires immediate actions on the ground to strengthen the process, a reaffirmation of Road Map requirements and the need for their implementation, and clear terms of reference for negotiations on all core issues that are grounded in the resolutions of the Council and agreements reached between the parties. It is vital at this juncture that the international community take a clear and united position.

The President: I thank Mr. Menkerios for his briefing.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.